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Tim Sweeney: Epic's CEO on Fortnite on Android, skipping Google Play, and the open Metaverse

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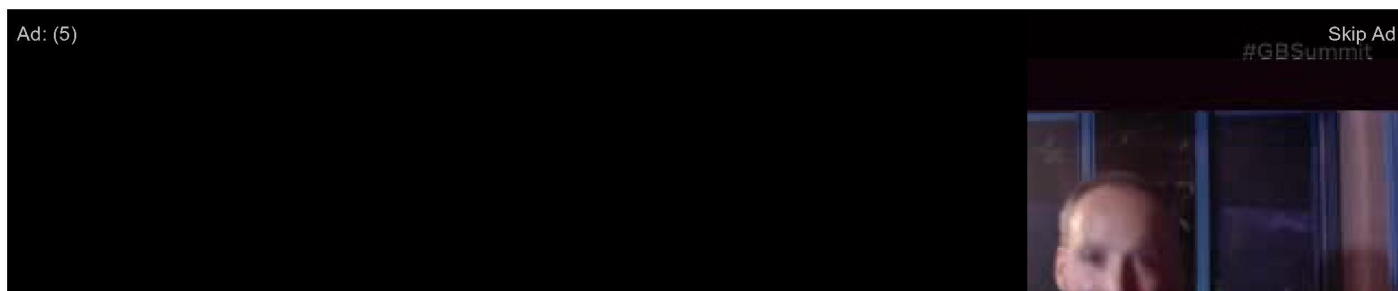


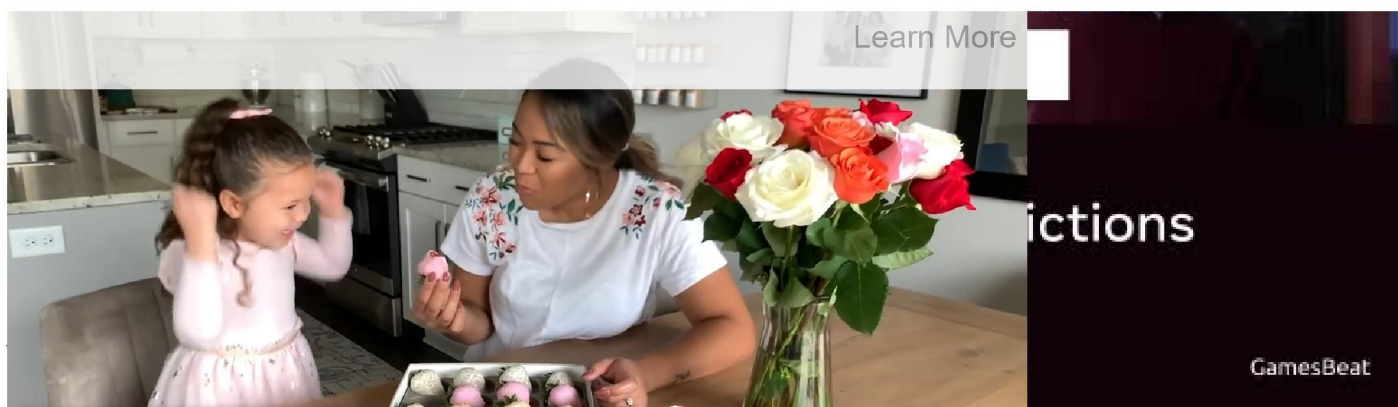


Fortnite has a wide reach when it comes to crossplay.
Image Credit: Epic Games

Tim Sweeney is quiet as CEOs go. But the head of [Epic Games](#) isn't shy when it comes to expressing his opinions about the state of games, game development, and the need for open technology initiatives to ensure the industry's future growth. Epic Games is launching [Fortnite](#) on Android soon, using [direct downloads from the Epic Games site rather than the Google Play store](#).

I talked about to Sweeney in advance of the launch of the Android version of Fortnite, which now spans all major platforms on consoles, mobile, and PC. The game is a living example of how you can take an Unreal Engine game and make it run across any platform where people want to play games. I have loaded the game on an Android device using Epic's Fortnite installer, and it worked.





discussion about how Fortnite is helping with the development of the Unreal Engine, the importance of blockchain to the open [Metaverse](#), the rise of Fortnite esports, why you won't find Fortnite on Google Play, and Sweeney's ongoing efforts to ensure that gaming remains as [open a business](#) as possible.

Here's an edited transcript of our interview.



Above: Tim Sweeney is the outspoken CEO of Epic Games.

Image Credit: Epic Games

GamesBeat: This must have been a lot harder to do, because there are so many versions of Android. How did you approach covering all the ground?



Tim Sweeney: That's a general issue with Android. There's a huge variety of OS versions and also a much wider range of hardware specs than any other device family, from a \$30 phone you can buy in India to a \$1,000 high-end device. The nature of Fortnite determined the direction here. Fortnite is the same game on all platforms, including high-end consoles and PCs. Fortnite is going to work on high-end Android devices. Of the 2.5 billion Android devices in the world or so, 300 million will run it well.

GamesBeat: Is it just on the Oreo version of the OS, or will you get to more versions than that?

Sweeney: The actual Android version isn't as much of a determining factor as the CPU and graphics processor set. Any device from up to three years ago with a high-end GPU should run the game pretty well. Oreo brings a large set of improvements to the installation experience. It's a much better open platform with a much better installation process for software from other sources than the Google Play store. But the game is broadly compatible with everything that meets the specs.

GamesBeat: It's an interesting technology statement. Is it also fun to play, when you've got mobile people against PC people?

Sweeney: If you're playing alone as a mobile player, or you're squadding up with other players on Android and iOS, you'll be matchmade only with other mobile players. You have parity there. If you want to squad up with people on other platforms, Android supports cross play with every console, computer, and mobile platform. Then you're matchmade with the general population of the game, which can include mobile, PC, and console all together. If you choose to do that, there are going to be players with different controllers. That's up to you.

What we're finding, really, is that the magic of the experience is that everyone can play together with all of their friends. In a single living room you can have a PlayStation player, someone on their laptop, someone on an iOS device, and someone on an Android device all playing in a single game session together. The experience of being together socially is so awesome that it kind of negates the control differences.

GamesBeat: Sony still hasn't quite made everyone happy, though, right?

~~Sweeney: Every case of cross-platform play and cross-platform purchasing is supported~~



or PlayStation player you can still play together with PC and all the smartphone devices. In a typical living room scenario, if you have a console and a laptop and some people on smartphones, you have pretty good connectivity there.

GamesBeat: When you have iOS playing with Android, what kind of experience is that going to be?

Sweeney: That works great. They're platforms with similar ranges of performance and similar controls. The experience feels perfectly natural. It's essentially the same games on all platforms, albeit with separate control schemes for PC, mobile, and console. All mobile devices have the same control scheme. There's a lot of parity in the behavior there.

Above: Fortnite won't be in the Google Play store.

Image Credit: Epic Games

GamesBeat: You guys just announced the Unreal Engine 4.20 this week. Does that come into play here at all as far as the timing of the Android version of Fortnite?

Sweeney: For the past six months we've done a huge amount of work to optimize the Unreal Engine for all mobile devices, and especially optimizing for Android compatibility and Android performance with Vulkan and OpenGL. All the optimizations we've done to date for Fortnite on Android are in that version. The real goal of all of this that we're



most beautiful high-end games in the industry, and then release it on everything, reaching a much larger audience than just the owners of high-end gaming-focused devices.

As a console developer you're targeting an installed base of, what, 80 million PlayStations, maybe half that many Xbox Ones, and the growing Switch market? The smartphone space has literally billions of devices that can play these games, depending on the performance tradeoffs. It's a huge opportunity for everybody.

GamesBeat: Do you already see some games in the pipeline that are going to do this, to go across all the platforms with Unreal?

Sweeney: ARK: Survival Evolved, the dinosaur survival game, is coming to iOS and Android. That's just one of them. In Korea, where there's not a lot of console market, we're seeing some incredible console-quality games at the top of the mobile game charts. Games like Lineage 2: Revolution. They're really bringing hardcore gaming experiences to these devices. That's just stuff that's been announced. There's a lot more in the pipeline.

I think we will see, over the next two years—a huge theme in the whole game industry will be connecting all of the platforms together and reaching the entire base of gamers. It's going to lead to huge growth. When gamers can play a game together with all of their friends, regardless of the devices they own, you have a much more compelling social experience. That applies to all multiplayer games.



Above: Epic Games takes a shot at sideloading Fortnite on Android phones.

Image Credit: Epic Games

GamesBeat: How do you view this as helping in your competition with Unity. Does this bring you into parity with them, or does it put you ahead of them in some ways?

Sweeney: Well, we really have different focuses. Unity is a kind of engine for the everyman. It's a super accessible engine that supports a huge range — pretty much every Android device you can buy today will run Unity games. It's targeted at indie developers, casual games, mobile games. Whereas Unreal Engine has long been dominant in high-end games, games for gamers, console games, PC games, and now these high-end mobile games. The majority of high-end mobile games at the top of the charts in Korea are in Unreal, and that's happening in China as well.

We've long seen this kind of indie versus triple-A production value split between Unity and Unreal. The move of mobile gamers to high-end games really will lead to significant growth in the adoption of those high-end games and that's good for Unreal. But both engines are strong. There's a need for both of them to exist.

GamesBeat: The strategy of Epic making its own games and Unity not making its own games — it kind of looked a little shaky when you were doing Paragon, but now it looks brilliant with the arrival of Fortnite.



Sweeney: We've always used our internal game development to push our engine forward, to tease out all the performance and optimization and opportunities there, so that all game developers can benefit from the work we're doing. It's especially important at the high end. The complexity of shipping a game like Fortnite across all these platforms — a very open-world game, 100-player networking, advanced graphics — it pushes the engine in all directions. I can't imagine how you could possibly build the technology base for a game like Fortnite without developing a game like that yourself.

GamesBeat: And that's come back to help in the form of a financial windfall, too. You've talked about doing a different kind of split with developers on your asset store.

Sweeney: Yeah, the Unreal Engine Marketplace is an exchange site focused on game developers. Content creators release assets like models and textures and animations there, and game developers can buy them to incorporate them in their games. A lot of the major successful Unreal Engine games are based on content from there. ARK: Survival Evolved and PUBG use a huge amount of Unreal Engine Marketplace stuff.

The awesome thing about Fortnite is it's brought a huge volume of digital commerce to Epic. We can now do that very efficiently. We can handle payment processing and customer support and download bandwidth with some great deals. We're passing the savings along with the Unreal Engine Marketplace. We've change the royalty split from the 30/70 you see everywhere to developers getting 88 percent. We find that's a great boon for developers.

The thing to understand about quality indie developers, and also asset creators, is that a large part of their income goes to costs. If they're making a 10 percent profit from their business, going from 70 percent to 88 percent triples that margin. It makes a huge difference in their ability to compete, to hire people and to grow. I really hope there's a better trend in the industry toward economic efficiency in distribution. Mastercard or Visa will process payments for 2.5 percent or 3.5 percent per transaction. These stores taking 30 percent is just out of line. There's a 4X profit margin or more.



Above: Look out below. Here comes Fortnite on Android.

Image Credit: Epic Games

GamesBeat: A lot of people, like Brian Fargo, are saying blockchain could be useful in helping improve that efficiency and getting down to lower percentages.

Sweeney: Yeah, it could. There was an article about somebody making a trade of \$100 million worth of Bitcoin, and of course there's a transaction processing fee associated with that, and it was something like seven cents? That's the ultimate extreme of efficiency in digital commerce. It's an exciting trend.

A lot of the reason that services like Mastercard and Visa charge two or three percent is because they have to provide consumer protections, anti-fraud, customer service, and other systems baked in. That costs real money to operate. That has to be a balancing factor. A store is only really reliable if customers feel they can get good service from it. That's a key consideration in all of this.

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